1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

during prenatal times; but an intimation from Mashém that the old men thought it much better to take the turtle with the teeth of an "animal that goes in the water", and the similarity in terms for "harpoon" (or arrow) and "teeth" both suggest that the aboriginal point may have been a sea-lion tooth, and that the foreshaft itself may have been a larger tooth of seal or cetacean. While the modern harpoon is shaped with the aid of metal (hoop-iron, etc.), the forms are quite evidently vestigial of knifeless manufacture, in which a naturally rounded or abraded or fire-shaped foreshaft was fitted into the natural socket afforded by a cane-stalk broken at its weakest point—i. e., just below the joint; and both function and socket arrangement (as well as the linguistic evidence) strongly suggest the cylindrical tooth as the germ of the apparatus.

It is probable that water-fowl, considered collectively, stand second in importance as Seri prey; and the foremost fowl is undoubtedly the pelican, which serves not only as a fruitful food-supply but as the chief source of apparel.

The principal haunt and only known breeding ground of the pelican in the Gulf of California is Isla Tasnne, an integral part of Seriland; and while the great birds are doubtless taken occasionally in Bahia Kunkaak, El Infiernillo, Bahia Tepoka, and other Seri waters, this island is the principal pelican hunting ground. According to Mashém's account, the chase of the pelican here is a well-organized collective process: at certain seasons, or at least at times deemed propitious by the shamans, pelican harvests are planned; and after some days of preparation a large party assemble at a certain convenient point (presumably Punta Antigualla) and await a still evening in the dark of the moon. When all conditions are favorable they set out for the island at late twilight, in order that it may be reached after dark; on approaching the shore the balsas are left in charge of the women, while the warriors and the larger boys, armed only with clubs, rush on the roosting fowls and slaughter them in great numbers—the favorite coup de grâce being a blow on the neck. The butchery is followed by a gluttonous feast, in which the half-famished families gorge the tenderer parts in the darkness, and noisily carouse in the carnage until overcome by slumber. Next day the matrons select the carcasses of least injured plumage and carefully remove the skins, the requisite incisions being made either with the edge of a shell-cup or with a sharp sliver of cane-stalk taken from an injured arrow or a broken balsa-cane. The feast holds for several days, or until the last bones are picked and the whole party sated, when the clans scatter at will, laden with skins and lethargic from the fortnight's food with which each maw is crammed.

Mashém's recital gave no indication as to whether the Pelican clan participate in the hunting orgies, though it clearly implies that the chase and feast are at least measurably ceremonial in character; and this implication was strengthened by the interest and comparative

1: McGee E-5 (1894-1895)1898 NU31 Seri NU31

vividly awakened in the Seri bystanders by their spokesman's frequent interlocutions with them during the recital. Unfortunately the account was not clear as to the seasons selected, though the expressions indicated that the feasts are fixed for times at which the young are fully fledged. It would seem inconceivable that the Seri, with their insatiate appetite for eggs and tender young, should consciously respect a breeding time or establish a closed season to perpetuate any game; yet it is probable that the pelican is somehow protected in such wise that it is not only not exterminated or exiled, but actually fostered and cultivated. It is certain that the mythical Ancient of Pelicans is the chief creative deity of Seri legend, and its living representative the chief tutelary of one of the clans; it is certain, too, that this fleshly fowl, sluggish and defenseless as it is on its sleeping grounds, would be the easiest source of Seri food if it were hunted indiscriminately; and it is no less certain that the omnivorous tribesmen would quickly extinguish the local stock if they were to make its kind, including eggs and young, their chief diet; yet it survives in literal thousands to patrol the waters of all Seriland in far-stretching files and vees seldom out of sight in suitable weather. On the whole, it would seem evident that an interadjustment has grown up between the tribesmen and their fish-eating tutelary during the centuries, whereby the fowl is protected, albeit subconsciously only, during the breeding seasons; and in view of other characteristics of the tribe it would seem equally evident that the protection is in some way effected by means of ceremonies and tabus.

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Somewhat analogous, though apparently less ceremonial, expeditions are made to Isla Patos and other points in search of ducks, and to Isla San Esteban, and still more distant islands in search of eggs (preferably near the hatching point) and nestlings; while the abundant waterfowl of the region are sought in Rada Ballena and other sheltered bays, as well as in such landlocked lagoons as those of Punta Miguel and Punta Arena. This hunting involves the use of bows and arrows, though the archery of the tribe pertains rather to the chase of larger land game, and apparently attains its highest development in connection with warfare. No specialized fowling devices have been observed among the Seri; and their autonomous recitals, the facies of their artifacts, and the observed habits of the tribe (especially the youth) with respect to birds, all indicate that ordinary fowling holds a subordinate place in Seri craft—i. e., that it is a fortuitous and emergency avocation, rather than an organized art like turtle-fishing and water-carrying. Concordantly, culinary processes are not normally employed in connection with waterfowl, and the customary implements used for incising the skin and severing other tissues are the shell-cup, which is carried habitually for other purposes, the cane-splint, which appears to be improvised on occasion and never carried habitually, and the ubiquitous hupf.

[222]

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FIG. 10. SERI BELLE
WEARING A PAINTED DESIGN SUCH AS FORMERLY WAS INDICATIVE OF THE BLOOD LINE OF A GIVEN CLAN.

264 but, the rotting flesh and cartilage of its noisome interior to be explored and mouthed by the toddling children or gnawed by the cringing coyote-curs attached to the rancheria.

223 At certain seasons or when deemed propitious by the elders of the family, a pelican harvest was planned. Isla Tasne, some fifteen miles from Tiburon Island, is the haunt and breeding ground of the pelican that served not only as a valuable food supply for the Seris, but also as the chief source of apparel. At such seasons temporary rancherias were set up on the shores of Bahia Kino, and when conditions were favorable, or when hunger prompted them, the balsas [502] would be launched in the evening toward Isla Tasne, the women of the party lying prone on the cane bundles and propelling the craft by paddling with their hands or with large hatchet clam shells. Reaching the island after dark, the balsas were left in charge of the women while the men and older boys, armed with clubs, crept up over the slippery, guano-covered rocks to rush on the roosting fowls and slaughter them. The [264]

[p. 179(B)]

3:Davis & Dawson E-5 (1922-1949) 1945
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[516]

FIG. 11. PAINTING THE FACE
USING A RED PIGMENT OBTAINED FROM THE TUBOTE.

223 lice-infested carcasses were then gathered
264 and brought to a central place among the stinking rocks where a gluttonous feast was held in the dark, the long ahungered tribesmen gorging themselves with the soft entrails and succulent parts, and carousing in the carnage until overcome by slumber.

281 The day following the slaughter, the
294 matrons collected the carcasses with least damaged plumage and carefully removed the skins, which were then gnawed and sucked clean of flesh and grease and dried in the sun (Fig. 8). From two or more of these skins they made a kilt or robe (Figs. 1, 2), the principal apparel, not so much for protection from cold as from the scratch and prick of the abounding spines and thorns of Seriland. The skins were sewed with sinew and often held in place on the body by a
283 cord made of human hair (Fig. 1). The
302 culture of their long, luxuriant hair, indeed, was an important matter. They brushed their hair regularly with a brush fashioned

[p. 200(A)]

224 Game pursuit is usually done on foot, mostly in the winter and very little in the summer. The intense heat of the desert in the summer makes hunting unattractive. The most frequent trophies are the Sonoran bighorn, peccary, cottontail and jack-rabbits. Sometimes, semi-wild burros, running loose on the adjacent extensive Mexican "rancherias", are poached for meat. The peccary is the only animal hunted with the aid of dogs. Large rodents are dispatched by sling-shot, stick, stone, or shot with a .22 caliber rifle. Birds, such as sea-gulls, ducks and pelicans, are clubbed, stoned or shot with a small caliber rifle.

462 While fishing and hunting are primarily men's occupations, the gathering
224 of the terrestrial and marine animals is almost exclusively women's work.
226 Rattlesnakes and other reptiles are often killed and brought to the encampments by the women from their morning trek into the desert after firewood and fruit. Small fish and marine invertebrates in the tidal pools are collected by women, aided by children of both sexes.

252 Preparation of meat is quite simple. It is either boiled in hot water with salt added as the only seasoning or else roasted whole, if small enough, over an open fire with or without a grill. The use of spices such as tomato sauce, chili, peppers, and the like, depend upon the tastes of the individuals and also upon the availability of money.

225 In individual competence as hunters or fishermen the men show a great deal
224 of variability. Some excel in fishing while others do so in hunting. Hand in
226 hand with this, goes the degree of knowledge of the local natural history and, as expected, the best fishermen lead in the knowledge of fishes while the best hunters possess the most extensive knowledge of terrestrial animals and insects. It has also been observed that boys were far ahead of adults in their knowledge of inconspicuous or otherwise commercially unimportant creatures such as insects, obscure marine invertebrates and small fishes. Interest in the commercially or otherwise economically important forms of animals unquestionably becomes overwhelming in adult life while much of the natural history lore learned in youth is forgotten.

Food Preferences and Taboos

262 A number of animals were reported as being a part of their diet in the past but which were not used at the present time. Several species of shells collected from kitchen middens along the coast were thus identified. In some instances it has been denied that a certain animal was used for food; yet, later when such a beast was brought to the camp, it would be added to the menu. Undoubtedly, some of the species were held in low esteem as food and the Seris preferred not to admit eating them.

Large fishes, especially pinta and baya, sea-turtles, and the very large chuckwalla lizard, which is brought back from rare expeditions to San Esteban Island, are the preferred cuisine. Cochi fish, also called puercos, are disdained. Large catches of these were frequently brought in from the sea, only to be unceremoniously dumped on the beach and left to the dogs and the vultures. But when other fish were scarce, the puercos were eaten. Pelicans, once an

9:Malkin E-5 (1953-1955)1962 NU31 Seri NU31

361 capital by paved road. Formerly, in the twenties and early thirties, Seris' chief mainland settlement. Now with the influx of the Mexicans, the Seris deserted the place completely as a camp site, although they still visit it occasionally. Distinct in the extensive sand beaches and sand marine flats which harbor peculiar bird, fish and insect fauna.

7. **Guaymas**—southernmost point considered here and probably also of the Seris' historical extension. Nowadays very rarely visited by them and probably only while cruising with the Mexicans. Large settlement, many tourists. Backlands; rocky desert.

8. **Tepopa**—spectacular rocky head just south of Desemboque, opposite to Tiburon. Caves, usual mountainous vegetation, *Sahuaro*. Many Seri hunting encampments and one of the places where the Sonoran bighorn is still hunted.

9. **Coast of Baja California** — very rocky area across the bay—almost never visited by the Indians.

10. **Tiburon**—island in the Gulf of California separated from the mainland by a narrow channel called "Infernillo," only a mile wide. Rugged, mountainous. By **Tiburon** is meant an overall island area in distinction from **Tecomate** or the mountains.

11. **Tecomate** — a water-hole and Seri campsite on the northern shore of Tiburon. Today this is the only permanent site on the island where these Indians, actually only a few families among them, still go to live for part of the year.

12. **Mountains of Tiburon** — rugged interior of the island, reaching up to almost 4000 feet. Usual vegetation cover with *Sahuaro* and other typically Sonoran floral components, fauna much as on the mainland except lacking cougar, bighorn and some other larger forms. The interior does have some "tenajas," that is water-holes and there is said to be a rivulet up in the mountains.

13. **Infernillo**—narrow channel between Tiburon and the mainland, often called locally "canal." For the terrestrial fauna and for birds reference is made to the mainland shores of Infernillo. For the marine fauna is meant either the open water in this channel or to the littoral off the mainland. The opposite shores and littorals are covered as "Tiburon." Maximum depth is said to be up to 25 fathoms.

14. **Isla Patos** — small island north of Tiburon and directly due west of Estero Sargente and halfway between Tiburon and Punto Tepopa. Visited by the Indians only occasionally, mostly in connection with the duck hunt.

15. **Isla Raza** — a small island between Angel de la Guarda and San Lorenzo.

16. **San Esteban Island**—a round island between Tiburon and San Lorenzo, up to 1700 feet elevation. Visited occasionally during fishing or turtle hunt trips or in search of a chuckawalla.

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IV

BIRDS

136 Woodpecker—There are several species in the area but Gila woodpecker (*Centurus uropygialis*)
128 is certainly one of them.

Hummingbird—Unspecified species, one of several occurring in the area according to Dr. Orr.

Economic Uses

262 Such use as had been made of the birds is largely in the form of an addition to the diet. Reading McGee, one gets the impression that the importance of the birds in the Seri diet, in contrast to the marine animals of all description, has declined greatly. We do know that in the past various birds and, most especially, the seagulls and the pelicans represented a significant item. But today out of the basic list of 24 species, only six has been reported as eaten and all, with an exception of the duck, in the past tense. The duck
*[825] evidently is the only bird which the Seri consider really fit to eat and yet, even here, there is temporary avoidance. Moreno told me that this bird "we eat only when we visit the island (Isla Patos).
●[223] But we do not eat it in September because it is
[252] too lean. We like it in December when it is fat. We then kill it at night with stones. It is roasted."[1]

All other birds were reported as eaten only in the past and this has been expressed more or less as follows: sea-gull eaten a few years ago, cormorant 8-10 years ago, pelicans 30-35 years ago. This would mean that the pelicans had been discarded as food, at least according to the official Seri version, in the early twenties, before Kroeber's visit. But the Seri disclaimers on the subject
183 of the bird diet are not entirely correct and re-
262 flect less the total rejection and more only low esteem in which these birds are held. For I have seen myself the sea-gull and the pelican eaten on few occasions when times were tough, and the
[261] food supply was non-existent, owing to the choppy
*[825] and windy seas. The Seris caught in the act of cooking the meagre flesh of the pelican or the sea-gull were obviously apologetic.

262 It is interesting that some of the birds present in the area, the quail or the woodpeckers, are not eaten although these birds figure prominently in the diet of some of the other groups. It may well be that the Seris consider them too small to bother.

[252] As far as I could find out, eggs of only two species of birds, the sea-gull and the heron, are collected, boiled and eaten. But the eggs of the

[1] His statement requires some explanation. There is no taboo on eating duck but the bird does not occur in Desemboque or any other place known to the Seris, with
[136] the exception of Isla Patos. Here these birds winter,
*[825] arriving in September and arrive worn out and lean, to recoup the fat, a few months later. The Seri unfamiliarity with their eggs is another indication that the birds come to Isla Patos only for the winter.

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262 pelicans are not; they are regarded as "bad food," unfit for eating. No further explanation has been offered here and it might be that the same sort of prejudice works here as in the case of the adult birds. Otherwise, reasons for rejecting eggs for food are probably a matter of mere customary attitude without any particular rationalization. In a few instances, the dove being one example, the eggs were said to have been rejected because they were "too small to bother."

237 Other economic uses made of the birds are ex-
291 tremely few. At one time, the pelican skins were used for clothing and, in fact, in McGee's time they represented, perhaps, the most important item of clothing for the Seris, having been worn in shape of wrap-around robes, usually covering the lower part of the body. Moreno reported these robes as still is use "30 years ago or more," in the early twenties, but in Kroeber's time these
[177] robes were already discarded in favor of the European garment. The Seri, nevertheless, still preserve skins of these birds—the white pelican,
[439] larger of the two, always had been favored here—and occasionally sell them to the visitors. Another
237 use made of the feather is in the arrows. The
411 cormorants, heron and the owls had been especially mentioned in this connection. But it is certain that they were not the only birds so exploited and also that this particular use went out of business along with the disappearance of the bow and arrow as the principal weapons. The use of feather for arrows may well continue into the present in a somewhat degraded form. The Seri boys play a
[857] great deal with bows and arrows, shooting them at any moving available target. They'll pick up any available feathers.

Pets

231 Somewhat desultory use is made of birds as pets. During my visit I have seen doves and an egret kept in houses as pets by the adults and fed quite frequently. The number and variety of birds which may become pets in households may well
* 825 be larger. Pelicans and sea-gulls are less fortun-
857 ate. They are often shot at and over-powered by the boys. But instead of taking them to the households, the boys stage games, shooting them at point blank from bows and arrows and pea- shooters. These somewhat bloody executions take place almost every day. The pattern is the same. Only the subject of the game changes, depending on the available species of bird or animal.

Hunting

●223 It is hard to speak of hunting in connection with birds, because there is so little effort made to go out and get them. The main exception is the duck and this, as I already mentioned, is hunted on Isla Patos and clobbered at night with sticks and stones in great numbers. This is one of the few instances in which the Seris will go out of their way to get a bird. Sea-gulls and cormorants and, more rarely, pelicans are dispatched by pea-
[411] shooter (stone), sticks, small clubs and, on occasion, with a shot from a .22 caliber rifle.

[p.18A]

000 search out an old fish head or Pelican bone. Discouraged, never!

123 • 223 We had intended going to Alcatraz *(Pelican Island)* and have the Indians secure more skins for us at night, but the wind was strong and not favorable, so the trip was put off. The Indians hold up torches of dry *pitahalla*, while another Indian knocks the Pelicans over the head.

123 224 Stan and three Indians started out for the *picachos* with rifles in a hunt for mountain lions and a *tigre* our Indian said he saw. They returned in the afternoon tired and hungry and carrying no game. Stan had mounted the highest peak, an almost perpendicular one, and dangerous climb.

123 593 One member of the hunting party, Santo Blanco *(Holy White)* which belies his name---as he is neither white nor holy---evidently didn't find his dinner waiting for him, and proceeded to beat up his poor wife. Perhaps she didn't expect him so soon or perhaps the larder was empty. At any rate, another woman, Luis Torres' wife, flew to her assistance and grabbed the rifle or stick and he cut her hand cruelly with his knife. She was brought whimpering to our camp, her poor thin hand dripping blood. One or two sympathizing women, crying softly, followed her.

I immediately put some flour over the cut and tore up strips of cotton goods and wrapped them round and round her hand, then pressed the veins to check the hemorrhage, and held her hand up. After fifteen or twenty minutes it ceased to drip, and an Indian brought me some mentholatum from my grip. I bathed her hand in salt water while she whimpered softly, put on the salve and re-wrapped her hand in clean goods and she returned to her camp. Her child picked up the discarded bloody clothes and took them to her.

123 Roberto had gone back for the things he had left, and at noon had returned with the car to Santa Cruz, intending to return by mule in the evening. He returned long after dark after five hours in the saddle. He had been bucked off once and lost in a jungle of timber, both down and standing for two hours. He was fenced inside this tangle, he said, finding it almost impossible to escape.

The mule was later to be tied up, rolled into the boat and taken to the Island for my use, so I would not get worn out walking and carrying food and water.

Again, we were lulled to sleep by the murmur of the sea.

On account of unfavorable conditions, we did not start in the boat the next morning, but fully expected to start the following morning. After breakfast we decided to give the Indians a feast. One Seri secured a five-gallon can three-quarters filled with water, and one by one I poured four cups of flour in it. I hesitated a moment and the Indian said "too much water," and all the crowd waited with bated breath. When I poured in an extra cup-full a great sigh of

[text continues on p.200]

The Pelican Skin Robe

133

Toshne of Pelican Island - Kino Bay - 1936

It was the dark of the moon and a very black night, ideal for surprising the Pelicans asleep, roosting on the steep slope above the waters of the Sea of Cortez. The Pelican is a very wary bird and cannot be approached in the light of the moon. 123 223

At sundown we had climbed several hundred feet to the saddle between two peaks on the Island of Alcatraz in Kino Bay off the coast of Sonora. We rolled up in our blankets and hugged the great volcanic rocks at the crest, to be as inconspicuous as possible to the great birds circling the peaks to seek a roosting place on the west slope of the Island.

Santo Blanco had provided himself with a torch made from the slender rods of a dead *pitahella* (organ) cactus which he had tied together in a long bundle. The four young Seris who joined him also had a torch and in addition, each had provided himself with a club. We took no fire arms. Senor Roberto Thomson, my companion, had arranged this trip with Santo Blanco, for my benefit. [416] [824]

[text continues on p. 215]

123 It was March and the night wind was cold, but we did not dare light
• 203 a fire, so we hugged our blankets close to us for warmth until Santo Blanco judged the Pelicans were sound asleep. We could hear the waters of the Gulf roaring softly as they broke against the cliffs far below us.

At midnight Santo Blanco lighted his torch and the other Indians
[21] did likewise. They all wore rawhide sandals to keep their feet from being cut on the sharp rocks. Santo Blanco was agile as a cat, as he jumped from rock to rock on the steep slope holding his torch over head. Part way down the party split, leaving Santo Blanco, Roberto and myself. I had a flashlight which threw a feeble ray on nearby
[134] rocks and then shot off into blackness. The rocks were slippery from droppings of thousands of cormorants, gulls, Pelicans and other sea birds and climbing down rocks on the steep slope and that on a dark night, was risky if not dangerous, for if we slipped or missed our footing, we might roll, bump a few times and drop from a high cliff into the sea.

Santo Blanco was far below us and at last we could hear him clubbing Pelicans over the head and by the time we reached him he had several dead Pelicans spread on the rocks and he was bringing in the last of them near where we had stopped.

There lay five of these great silver gray birds, each boasting a wing spread of ten feet, as against seven feet of the golden eagle. The flashlight picked them out, one by one, with their long necks, long bills, and with pouches on the nether mandibles for temporary storage of their catch. They are very awkward and ungainly as they stand in groups on rocks at the edge of the tide, but when their great pinions are spread in flight over the sea, they are the epitome of grace.

That was a heavy load, over one hundred pounds, for one man to pack up those steep slippery rocks. I suggested that we help Santo Blanco to the top, but Roberto said the Pelicans were covered with lice and it was not advisable, but with Santo a few more or less made no difference. So he tied the birds together and swung them over his shoulders leaving his hands free for climbing. His torch had burned out and our only light was my flashlight to pick out hand and foot holds. At times we would reach down and give him a lift where the rocks were steepest, but for the most part he struggled alone. Sometimes he would find a few steps like a stairway and then he would look for an easy way, using both hands to pull himself up, but there was no easy way. It was a herculean task to climb those slippery rocks and one time the load almost pulled him over backward, but he recovered his balance and finally the crest of the hill was reached and the rest was down hill on an easy trail.

The boys already had a camp fire going near the beach and as soon as Santo deposited his load, they all fell to and began skinning the

[text continues on p. 217]

123 birds. As soon as the skin was off the breast was laid on top of the
223 coals and roasted. The meat was red as raw beef, but it was free of
[262] fishy flavor and tasted excellent. The Indians ate pelican flesh till daylight.

252 We gave them a generous helping of flour in a pail and this with
[123] water from a canteen, Santo stirred vigorously with a stick and then kneaded the dough with his hands until it was of the right consistency. He rolled hunks of this into little balls of dough about the size of golf balls, which he laid on his blanket. The boys picked these up, patted them flat like pancakes, scraped away ashes and sand from the edge of the fire, placed their pancakes in the hollow, covered them with hot ashes and hot sand, and in about three minutes pulled them out all baked brown. They shook the ashes and sand from them, leaving them clean and ready to eat. I am telling this in detail to show how simple cooking can be done without a dutch-oven, frying pan, or cooking grease, far from civilization.

281 We were soon paddled across to their village on the shores of
[123] Kino Bay and the skins turned over to Mrs. Santo. The skins had been split down the back, leaving the breast unmarred. The wings and legs had already been removed, and she sewed the skins together with sinew recovered from the birds. The boys had secured an extra pelican making six, three to a side, then placed together and sewed lengthwise, making a robe three and a half feet wide by seven feet long.

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[301]

Pegging out and drying a Pelican skin robe by a Seri Indian woman - 1936